



INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: February 22, 1993
TO: Distribution
FROM: G. H. Setlock, Environmental Protection Management Bldg. 080, X8632
SUBJECT: REQUIREMENTS FOR RAPTOR PROTECTION ON PLANT SITE - GHS-070-93

Rocky Flats Plant, especially the area included in the buffer zone, is important raptor habitat. Because human disturbance in the buffer zone is minimal, hawks, eagles, and owls use RFP in larger numbers than surrounding areas.

As you have been informed from past plant announcements and local media coverage, a pair of bald eagles started nest building in a cottonwood grove a short distance northwest of Standley Lake during January 1993. This pair has been hunting prairie dogs on the east side of RFP as well as east of Indiana Street. In past years, bald eagles have been frequently observed cruising the Rock Creek drainage at low altitude, hunting for prey. While they do sometimes rest on the large trees and power poles, they have not been recorded as roosting (spending the night). The eagles use RFP mainly as a foraging area. Bald eagles are more commonly observed at RFP during the winter months, but a few individuals remain in the vicinity year-round. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is monitoring the nesting activity, and federal and local officers are protecting the nest site from human disturbance.

The presence of the nest will, in all likelihood, impact Operable Unit (OU) 3 activities because field work must be curtailed during the nesting season. Depending upon the success of the mating activity, nesting could terminate anytime between the end of April to late summer. This call will be made by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife service and projects curtailed cannot be undertaken until notification is received from this agency.

OU3 projects offsite that will be impacted include air quality monitoring installations, wind tunnel construction, and the court ordered revegetation efforts. Normal onsite activities such as grass cutting, WSI surveillance, and routine monitoring activities are sufficiently enough removed from the nest site that impacts on the bald eagle nesting activities are unlikely. Should bald eagles be observed onsite, the above mentioned activities should be curtailed in the vicinity until the birds have moved off.

It is strongly recommended that all RFP personnel avoid the nesting area until appropriate management of the area can be clarified with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Any interference with the eagles is considered a federal offense; this includes disturbing the eagles while they may be foraging around RFP. The act of disturbing (harassing) eagles, even unintentionally, is defined as a "take" per the Endangered Species Act and has criminal penalties associated with it. Additionally, if any RFP worker spots a bald eagle on or around the plant site, he/she should call Steve Nesta, Manager of Ecology and NEPA Division, on X8605 to report the time of day the bird is spotted, the location, and what it was doing. The Ecology and NEPA Division of EG&G is required by DOE to keep a log of these events.

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BY (303) 966-7000 G. T. Ostidiek 870
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Golden eagles, are year-round residents at RFP, and use trees and power poles for roosting and resting. American peregrine falcons and prairie falcons have also been observed at RFP, but their activities have been largely restricted to foraging. Rough-legged hawks commonly use RFP as winter range, but return to the northern tundra areas to breed. These hawks are resident from late fall to early spring, roosting and hunting at RFP. The recovered native prairie provides excellent habitat for small mammals, the chief prey of most raptors, and RFP is an attractive feeding center for those predators. The prolific vole and mouse populations at RFP support a large variety of raptors and owls throughout the year. Prairie dogs also provide high quality hunting for the larger species of raptors. Raptor and owl species recorded at RFP, in addition to those species already discussed, are merlin, American kestrel, sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, northern harrier, turkey vulture, great horned owl, long-eared owl, and short-eared owl.

Large cottonwood trees in all three main drainages on RFP are used regularly as nesting sites by hawks and great horned owls. To date, nests or nesting activity by red-tailed hawks, Swainson's hawks, and great horned owls have been observed. A juvenile ferruginous hawk has been observed nest building, but nesting was not completed. Great horned owls also heavily use the shrubland of Rock Creek as nesting area. Northern harriers are suspected to nest on plant site, but because the nests are ground nests built in heavy marsh vegetation, nesting has not been confirmed. The relatively large extent of suitable nesting habitats for this species, and the number of juveniles observed, however, suggests nesting activity onsite. There are only a few raptor nests onsite in a given year, because these species are very territorial and will not tolerate other raptor nests in close proximity to their own.

Raptors that nest at RFP are generally tree nesting and ground nesting species. There are no cliffs or bluffs, as required by falcons. Until 1993, there had been no bald eagle nesting activity closer to RFP than Barr Lake. Nesting of this species occurs more commonly in the northern part of Colorado. There is potential nesting habitat on RFP, but bald eagles are generally faithful to a nesting site, so nesting attempts are likely to continue at the site they have already selected. There is potential nesting habitat for golden eagles which nest statewide in Colorado. The large cottonwood trees in the creek bottoms are appropriate nest sites for these eagles, though nesting activity has not been recorded.

Any RFP employee who finds a nest should not disturb it and should notify Steve Nesta on X8605.

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